



Small Group Poverty Consultation Series

Led by the BCPRC Community Action Network

Dates: Three discussions on March 12th, March 14th, March 20th 2018

Location: Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House

Small group discussions took place on site during existing programs providing drop-in and food security access for a diversity of DTES community members.

Fathers for Thought support group, Community Drop-In, Family Drop-In.

All discussions facilitated by DTES residents/members of the PRC Community Action Network.

All participants are currently in deep poverty with extensive lived experience of poverty.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Fathers for Thought: Fathers living in the DTES in precarious housing at risk of homelessness, or currently homeless, men who have experienced addictions, poverty, loss of child custody. Group included Indigenous and racialized fathers. 5 Indigenous men, 2 racialized. 9 in attendance.

Community Drop-In: Diversity of men and women DTES residents accessing the breakfast and lunch service. Talking group included men, women, Indigenous, racialized folks. 8 in attendance.

Family Drop-In: Families residing in the DTES. 3 families in attendance.

NOTES: Father for Thought, March 12th, 2018

ISSUES

WELFARE

- I get nearly \$1000 a month but I can barely make ends meet, I don't get enough
- On PWD, I can't even afford a hair cut, a decent meal—not enough for anything at all, everything is a compromise
- If I had more money I would be more social, I could be more in community.
- WorkBC will pay for schooling if you get a kid but not otherwise
- I am a dad, but don't have my kids (so can't get SPEI)
- I barely make ends meet. I want a part-time job to make more money.
- I want a work-training program
- PWD is too low

- \$20 crisis grant is not enough for a crisis
- Work BC doesn't work at all (when you are on welfare, PWD)
- I want to pick up a hammer and get paid for it properly
- Volunteer work and community work never is counted on your resume
- I started this support group for dads, but none of that kind of contribution ever counts

HOUSING

- Poor housing is my main issue
- It's been 4 years, nothing changed; Canada Hotel is full of needles and bugs
- Dominion Hotel: new tenant was violent-housing is unsafe in DTES
- The supportive housing offers few protections, they can turf you out
- I am living at The West and my window has been smashed since January, just a piece of plastic
- With the landlords, there is discrimination, stigma, the landlords trample on everyone, raise the rent, kick you up.
- My rent is \$500 now, they raised the rent when welfare went up.
- Gentrification—they are replacing the buildings we can afford with big towers. Where do we live?

EMPLOYMENT/WORK

- Work under the table, most have to do it to survive
- If you declare it they claw it back off welfare and you can't live
- They want us to work, and then they claw it back? Makes no sense
- Everybody works and gets paid under the table down here
- We need a job work program—you know, jobs on the side of the road, we need that
- We need to get paid to work to build up our communities
- There are these temp jobs; you show up and start working
- \$15 is pretty good to swing a hammer, but less sucks
- I worked in Alberta for \$13.80, then they bumped it up to \$15 there that was great
- It is \$11.80 here-terrible
- There are these places: Workforce, etc, and you can pick up a shift every Monday at 9
- **But temp work is just like a band-aid for a broken arm**
- All the temp work down here—you can't keep vacation and it is all short term
- Can't get any savings from temp work
- Its just working to live and that's not what work should be, you should be able to get ahead
- Problem is jobs down here don't pay enough

TRANSIT

- On PWD, we have bus passes
- If not on PWD, no bus pass and then you can't get to work.
- I got a job in North Van but it's a 2 zone so I can't afford to take the job. It's the first two weeks of work—I had no money before my first pay cheque to get there to take the job. If I pay to get two zones and work, I have no money for food. So how do I start working?

- You have to apply for an emergency loan to get to work, but you still have no money for lunch and dinner and you can't start doing labour without those meals when you work
- Kids are in Coquitlam, I can't see them too often because I can't afford to get there because I can't afford the transit cost to go see them

FOOD SECURITY

- Not allowed to have a hot plate
- They give out food on the rez, but here I can't afford food at the prices now
- Carnegie is \$2.75 for a meal. I eat once a day at the 44, that is all I can afford, one meal a day.
- I eat one hot meal a day, that's it.

GENERAL/SERVICES

- Racism is a problem for me, and also mental illness is silent
- I always have a lot on my plate it is stressful
- I am tired of standing in line, we need no more standing in lines

SOLUTIONS

WORK

- We need more jobs at \$15 or more with benefits too and sick days and holiday time
- If you do have Grade 12, we need more opportunities to use it so train us more to get jobs
- Count volunteer work and community work as valuable towards getting paid work
- We need training in trades, all the trades
- You need tailored care to help you get back to work
- A full-time job at \$15 wouldn't be too bad
- In Alberta, they have a jobs course for welfare people
- Raise wages and ensure benefits
- More full time jobs at decent wages, less temp and social service 'pretend' work

TRANSIT

- We need bus passes for all poor people
- We can get to work then

SERVICES

- There are services missing for dads who are homeless but want to see their kids and be in their lives. We need support to see our kids.

WELFARE

- Rates too low for PWD and regular; we 'need more money'

HOUSING

- We need more container housing
- Crack down on bad landlords not tenants

- Fix SRO problem for good
- Make sure DTES has safe housing it is a right

Summary

- Sub-standard housing in the DTES must be dealt with and impacts peoples attempts to 'get ahead' in every way possible, plus endangers them daily, impacts their long-term health.
 - Emphasis on full-time jobs at \$15 and a Living Wage with benefits needed, rather than temp work at low wages, for men in the DTES who are ready and willing to work.
 - Access to affordable transit would enable people to access the jobs and employment they want to attain to lift themselves out of poverty and connect with their families.
 - Low welfare and PWD rates keep people in a state of hunger and abject poverty in the DTES and must be raised.
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NOTES: Community Drop-In: March 14th, 2018

ISSUES

WELFARE

- Work BC only pushes you to minimum wage when you on welfare
- I was cut off welfare because of my injury and the clawbacks and disability payment, I cut my finger off
- Welfare promotes dishonesty—medical coverage is taken away if off welfare

HOUSING

- Assisted supported housing mean you are not able to go to work and go to school.
- In supported housing you aren't a tenant, you are a patient and you have no rights
- SRO rules and restrictions impacts well-being (shared bathrooms, visitors, sexual harassment, rules are broken, safety is a problem so feel confined to your room)
- I am couch surfing, feeling stuck in poverty
- Violation of rights in supportive housing, they put mentally ill on your record. Feels like prison instead of support and they institutionalize people
- Problem with the DTES is that your child will be taken away. You have to move away to have children, this is discrimination against parents
- No housing for families down here
- Bedbugs, no safeguard. Room checked each month.
- Traffic of people at night is bad and there are bedbugs in the hall

FOOD SECURITY

- I have to eat at all the organizations because I just have a hot plate but hard to cook with no fridges, freezer and just tiny ones, can't stock up or buy bulk
- There is theft of the community freezers so can't use them
- But the charity food not nutritious not good for health

- Problems with always eating charity food is you have to walk all around to get it

TRANSIT

- Transportation hard to get, the DTES is like “a prison without walls”
- Can’t get out on transit too expensive

WORK and EMPLOYMENT

- Unfair treatment at work in housing, got poked by needles on job, then got fired for complaining about unsafe working conditions
- Lots of illegal work to make extra cash, panhandle, street market, theft, prostitution, bootlegging, acting because rates so low—this forces the illegal work

SUPPORT SERVICES/ADDICTIONS/HEALTH

- There is denial of access to services and actual resources that can help us get out of poverty
- Harm reduction is not organized well
- MSP premiums missed and then they take away your coverage

GENERAL

- When your dignity is taken away it leads to drug use
- Theft between people a problem in the DTES

SOLUTIONS

TRANSIT

- \$5 month bus passes like in Calgary
- Bikes should be allowed at shelters
- We need to campaign for bus passes
- Transit would help with getting ID, services, to look for work
- We can’t access those community bikes because you need a credit card
- We need bike parking because you can’t park bikes at SROs, shelters, supportive housing

WELFARE

- \$100 raise only small we need to raise the rates more

SERVICES

- Laundry services at drop in centres—more detergent needed and more laundry mats
- We need more resource rooms to look for work, access computers, phone, phone not long enough to get through to income assistance, that’s a big problem
- With the resource rooms we also need more children’s programs and families welcome
- More community programs needed for people with disabilities. We have time but we need programs that give something to do and that build community

HOUSING

- Utilities costs too much, need to be reduced
- I want to choose my neighbourhood not end up somewhere, we need affordable housing everywhere
- We could use marinas and house boats, use the sea for affordable housing
- We can join the Tenants Committee we are starting the DTES Vancouver Tenants Union

FOOD SECURITY

- Lower food costs and provide low cost food options
- No cheap groceries in the DTES but we need that

Summary

- DTES needs low-cost food amenities, and to protect existing affordable food in the neighbourhood.
 - Supported housing providers must be audited for best practises on a regular basis.
 - DTES residents feel trapped in the DTES due to lack of affordable transit and this impedes their ability to work, thrive, access health services, etc.
 - DTES conditions break up families and impedes their health and thriving; more supports and services needed for those with children in the DTES
 - Build quality, affordable housing in the DTES and everywhere in all neighbourhoods.
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NOTES: Family Drop-In, March 20th, 2018

ISSUES

HOUSING

- Safe, secure adequate housing: I can't afford it, landlord hasn't done work (mould, pests)
- I live in unsafe housing
- Renovictions cause instability/stress, can't make long term plans

ENVIRONMENT-FAMILY LIFE in DTES

- Drugs, prostitution on the streets: not desirable for a neighbourhood where you are raising kids
- Having to explain it all to kids and say its not ok for them all the time
- Neighbourhood causes trauma, witness overdose, usage, drugs etc

CHILD CARE

- Hard to work as a single mom, hard to find daycare for children at time you need, limited spaces.
- Unsure if private nannies are trained/safe
- Want licensed facility but few spaces

TRANSIT

- Sometimes bus too full for stroller at rush hour

- Driver's sometimes don't wait for you to sit down before driving
- Need empathy for people with disabilities on transit

FOOD SECURITY

- Groceries are expensive in Vancouver
- Organic stores are unaffordable full of foods can't get
- Corner stores have high prices on food
- Hard to keep and prepare food while living in an SRO because lacking fridge and stove
- Health, mood, child development all impacted by poor diet
- Poor food at shelters
- We

SERVICES

- There are no family doctors accepting new patients in the DTES
- Doctors treat you a different way if you are from DTES (if they are from a different area)
- They fear you will sell pain meds

SOLUTIONS

TRANSIT

- Free public transit

FOOD SECURITY

- We need a food program with a vegetable co-op/produce box but AFFORDABLE
- We need a way to grow and keep food in the community

HOUSING

- Up the tax on empty units
- House people in the empty units
- Lower housing prices
- Make rent based on income (eg: 30% income on housing)
- Rent control with wage increases at same time great for people
- Holding landlords accountable: more tenants advocates to enforce the RTA

WELFARE AND SECURITY

- Raise minimum wage up more
- Environmental justice: no pipelines on land where poor people live

SERVICES

- Provide more services for parents who are together and families
- More services for single fathers and two parent families generally

- More safe sites for drug users so it's not happening in front of family buildings and on 'our doorsteps'
- Stronger consumer protection laws so poor people don't get dinged by bad warranties etc
- More response to opioid crisis
- More mental health services
- Free basic items like produce, tampons, diapers

WOMEN

- More investigation into missing and murdered women and better treatment of the families

CHILD CARE

- More licensed child care spaces
- Crack down on bad child care operators

Summary

- Focus on opioid crisis, plus drugs and prostitution in DTES obscures needs of families in the DTES and denies children's rights in the DTES.
- Access to basic health services needed for families in the DTES.
- Unsafe housing conditions would be solved by cracking down on landlords through the RTA and strengthening renters' rights generally.
- DTES needs more affordable food amenities, to protect existing ones, and to provide new food security options like access to gardens and vegetables.
- Provide affordable transit options and raise the PWD and IA rates.